

# Partnerships in Learning: The Schuylkill Center and Green Woods Charter School

by Virginia Ranly, Director of Education



Summer is an energized time at The Schuylkill Center. Nature Ramblers Summer Campers are out on the trails. Visiting groups from throughout the region arrive at The Center each day to explore the grounds and experience this special, nature-filled corner of Philadelphia. This is a time when we are busy with programs to showcase the height of summer, and we are also actively preparing for another school year and the close to 15,000 school students, scouts and adults who will participate in one of our programs. We intend to make each encounter meaningful and memorable, and most importantly, we work to achieve programs that will empower students to leave this world a better place.

No two programs are alike. Will you see the wild turkeys on the trail today? Will the school we're visiting have a rain garden? Will the teachers in the Arcadia University graduate courses have their own interesting stories from today? Each and every experience at The Schuylkill Center is unique and important, and we aim to take advantage of each teachable moment. Some students we see for just a few hours total, and others, like the students at the on-site Green Woods Charter School, we are able to work with for a few hours *each week*. We like to think the Green Woods students are receiving the full Schuylkill Center experience—and the results are extraordinary.

The Schuylkill Center and Green Woods Charter School are entering the sixth year of this educational partnership. The details of the partnership have been refined over these years, working ever more intently toward the central mission we share of providing education that has the environment both at its core and weaved throughout.

Schuylkill Center educators work with the Green Woods faculty in both teaching and planning. The Schuylkill Center educators spend two to three hours per week in each grade. They team-teach with the Green Woods classroom teachers, covering topics from watershed and wetlands, to agriculture, ecology, natural resources and renewable energy. Schuylkill Center educators lead the students on hikes, where the outdoors regularly becomes the classroom and the students become a part of The Center's landscape.

Schuylkill Center educators have become a resource for the Green Woods teachers outside of those dedicated hours, too. When art projects incorporate themes from last week's hike, math class uses data collected from a plant survey, and the natural resources discussed in social studies are the same as the ones we studied outside, themes emerge and the students are able to make numerous connections, solidifying otherwise new and foreign concepts.

We have experienced the students' enthusiasm at each of the grade levels—excitement over bats, pride in building a model dam, commitment to adopting a forest restoration site—some days this sense of wonder and excitement is more than enough to feel great about this educational partnership and the work that we do. Satisfaction comes also with seeing the Green Woods students succeed academically. Like all public school students, Green Woods students take standardized tests each year. Results of the Fall 2006 Terra Nova tests show that students at Green Woods ranked higher than the general Philadelphia School District in all areas, with the science scores being especially high. In all grades, 3-8, Green Woods Charter School students far exceeded the local, state, and national averages in these TerraNova exams. Green Woods is also expected to make AYP (Adequate Yearly Progress) through their efforts on the state PSSA exams. Green Woods has consistently met AYP each year.

In addition to test scores, many students are graduating from Green Woods with a passion for science. Fourteen of the twenty-two graduating 8<sup>th</sup> grade students from the Class of 2007 applied to and were accepted into the Science Leadership Academy High School in Philadelphia. Many chose to attend, while some decided to go to Central High School.

Each Green Woods graduate will choose his or her own path in life. We are confident that spending so many hours of their formal education immersed in The Schuylkill Center surroundings will have a positive influence on their ability to make smart choices about how our planet is stewarded in the future. The collaboration between The Schuylkill Center and Green Woods

continues to grow and improve, providing this unique learning opportunity for hundreds of Philadelphia students.

The educators at The Schuylkill Center are proud of all of our programs and the students with which we are able to interact. Whether it is immersing the students in our fields and forests or our visits to the region's neighborhoods, we are able to reach thousands of people each year with a message of environmental preservation and conservation. Join us for a program to learn more about how the world around you keeps on, and discover some inspiration for your own life.